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# The New Configurations of Popular Movements in Latin America[1]

## Neoliberalism and social conflict

The 1990s opened the way to a renewed capitalist globalization in its neoliberal form, whose impact on Latin America has been glaringly noticeable and profound. Extending a process begun in previous decades, promoted now by the so-called "Washington Consensus", the adoption of neoliberal policies was to become generalized all over the region, taking on a newly radical form. The governments of Carlos Menem (Argentina), Alberto Fujimori (Peru), Salinas de Gortari (Mexico), Collor de Melo and later Fernando H. Cardoso (Brazil), became some of its best-known presidential incarnations. The profound and regressive consequences in social and democratic terms entailed by the application of these policies (mass pauperization being one their most tragic expressions) were the result of the acute structural transformations that modified the societal geography of Latin American capitalisms in the framework of the new order that appeared to be imposed by so-called "neoliberal globalization"[2].

The application of these policies certainly faced numerous forms of resistance and protests in the region. In the first half of the 1990s two Latin American presidents (Collor de Melo in Brazil and Carlos Andrés Pérez in Venezuela) had to leave their posts in an "unexpected" manner as the result, among other issues, of rising unease and social repudiation. Nevertheless, in the regional context, the acts of resistance in those years to the application of the neoliberal recipes exhibited a configuration much more fragmented in social terms and more localized in sectorial and territorial terms than those that preceded them, while being unable in most cases to hinder the implementation of those policies. In the terrain of the social disciplines, this process, mediated by the hegemony wrested by the dominant thinking and its formulations regarding the "end of history", meant the displacement of the *problématique* of conflict and of social movements from the relatively central space it had filled in the preceding decades – although from different perspectives– to an almost marginal and impoverished position.

Nevertheless, toward the end of that decade Latin America's social reality again appeared marked by a sustained increase in social conflictivity. The continuing nature of this process may be appreciated in the survey carried by the Latin American Social Observatory (in Spanish, OSAL-CLACSO) for the nineteen countries of the Latin American region (see Chart 1), which for the period ranging from May-August 2000 to the same quarter of 2002 shows a rise in the number of the episodes of conflict surveyed of more than 180%. Because of the regional magnitude it attains (beyond exceptions and national differences), because of the characteristics it exhibits, and because of its perdurability, this increase in social conflictivity accounts for the appearance of a new cycle of social protest, which, being inscribed in the force field resulting from the regressive structural transformations forged by the implanting of neoliberalism in our countries, emerges to contest the latter.

In some cases, the Zapatist uprising of early 1994 has been pointed out as the emblematic event of the awakening of this cycle. This reference turns out to be significant insofar as, from diverse points of view, the revolt of the Chiapas indigenous exhibits some of the elements that distinguish the social movements that were to characterize the political and social realities of the region in recent years. In this regard, the national and international impact of the

Zapatist uprising renders account of the emergence of movements of rural origin constituted on the basis of their indigenous identity; of the democratic demand for the collective rights of these peoples –which, in its claim for autonomy, questions the constitutive foundations of the nation-state; of the demand for a radical democratization of the political management of the state; and of the summoning of continental and global convergences. Beyond the specificity of the references that accompany and characterize Zapatism, its emergence sheds light, in a wider sense, on some of the particular aspects that appear to mark the majority of the popular movements that fill the ever more intense setting of social conflictivity in the region because of their organizational characteristics and of their forms of struggle, the inscriptions that give them an identity, their conceptualizations of collective action, and their understandings in relation to power, politics and the state. Therefore, it is not just a case of the beginning of a new cycle of social protests, but also of these appearing as incarnated in collective parties with particular features and that are different from those that had occupied the public scene in the past. At the same time, these experiences and the increase in social protest in Latin America were to develop in an almost simultaneous manner to the increase in conflict in other regions of the planet in a process that would mark the constitution of a space for international convergence in opposition to neoliberal globalization –what the mass media have named as the "antiglobalization" or "globaliphobe" movement and which, to be more precise, may be called an "alterglobalist" movement.

Lastly it may be pointed out that this rise in social protest and the emergence and consolidation of new social and popular movements converged into diverse social confrontation processes that, attaining major national significance, in some cases in recent years entailed the toppling of governments, the creation of deep political crises, or the failure of undertakings of a neoliberal character. In this regard, the "Gas War" (2003) in Bolivia, which ended with the resignation of the government of president Sánchez de Lozada and the opening of a transition that is still underway, emerges as inscribed within this process of mobilization of society that began with the "Water War" in Cochabamba (2000), also being expressed in the struggles of the coca-growing movement in the Chapare region and of the indigenous movement in the Altiplano plateau. Likewise, the indigenous uprising in Ecuador (2000), culminating in the fall of the government of Jamil Mahuad, marked the consolidation of the Confederation of the Indigenous Nations of Ecuador (in Spanish, CONAIE) in the context of social response to neoliberal policies in that country.

At the same time, the emergence and spread of the movement of unemployed workers in Argentina and the protests of the workers of the public sector in the second half of the 1990s converged with the mobilization of broad urban sectors of the middle classes to trigger the resignation of the government of president De la Rúa in late 2001. In the case of Brazil, one may stress the setting up of the Workers' Unified Center (in Portuguese, CUT, in 1983) and of the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST, 1984), which starred in the opposition to neoliberal policies and were at the basis of the election victory of the presidential candidacy of Lula Da Silva (2002). In the same sense, the peasant mobilizations in Paraguay, which were to play an important role in the fall of president Cubas Grau (1999), will prolong themselves in the confrontation with the neoliberal policies promoted by succeeding governments; and the intense social protests in Peru (particularly the experience of the regional Civic Fronts) that were to mark the fall of the Fujimori regime (2000) were to continue in the resistance to the privatist policies promoted by the government of president Toledo (2002-2003).

It was precisely on the basis of the importance of these processes that, in early 2000, the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) decided to create the Latin American Social Observatory (OSAL) program with the aim of promoting a monitoring of social conflictivity and studies on social movements as well as regional exchanges and debate about these subjects. Over this period of more than four years, the work performed by OSAL led to the development of a chronology of the events of social conflict in nineteen countries of the continent, as well as the preparation of a publication, three times a year, which –with the participation of numerous Latin American researchers– has broached an analysis and collective

reflection regarding the main acts of protest and the outstanding social movements on the regional scene over the course of these recent years. The main conclusions and pointers emerging from this extended endeavor nourish the present contribution.

In this regard, the initial goal of this article will consist in offering an approximation of the particular configuration that characterizes this cycle of protests and the popular movements that take part in it. In its first part we attempt to deal with this question on the basis of a general description that presents the recent social conflictivity in the region, its most outstanding features, and the parties that participate in it, to conclude by pointing out some elements that appear to distinguish the experience and actions of the most relevant social movements. The second part of the present contribution is centered on a more thorough analysis of the latter.

## The contemporary scene of social protest in Latin America

We have already pointed out that the new cycle of protests that acquires momentum towards the end of the 1990s and the social movements that star in it offer distinctive features that differentiate them from those of the 1960s and 70s. The first evident fact tells us that the majority of the social organizations that promote these protests have emerged or been refounded in the last two decades. However, it is not only a matter of remitting exclusively to the organizational life or history of these movements, but particularly of the configuration they assume and that distinguishes them even within the map of the social conflictivity that characterized the 1980s and early 90s.

In this regard, if through the end of the 1980s, at least, the wage-earning Keynesian-Fordist conflict (and particularly the industrial conflict) constituted one of the main hubs of social conflictivity in the region, union organization additionally being the model that –in one way or another– marked the organizational nerve system of the majority of urban and rural social movements as well as fulfilling an outstanding role in the political and social articulation of the particular demands of collective participants, the structural transformations imposed by neoliberalism in all orders of social life (and in particular in the economy and the labor market under the de-industrialization and economic financiarization processes) were to sink that matrix of collective action into crisis, and weaken (albeit not eliminate) the weight of wage-earners' unions as the starring parties in the conflict. In counterpart, as a result of the process of concentration of income, wealth and natural resources that marks neoliberal policies, new social movements with a territorial basis both in the rural world and in the urban space have emerged on the Latin American stage, constituting themselves on the basis of their ethnic-cultural identity (the indigenous movements), in reference to what they lack (the so-called "-less movements", like the landless, roofless or jobless) or in relation to their shared life habitat (for example the movements of settlers).

Thus, the model of a return in the economy to raw materials, and the central role taken on in this context by agrarian restructuring processes, witness the emergence, in counterpart, of notable movements of rural origin. Also acting in the same direction is the privatization and intensive exploitation of natural resources that affects and upsets the life of numerous rural communities. This is undoubtedly one of the distinctive elements of the new phase that we analyze, and which crystallizes particularly in the major role of the indigenous movements, especially in Ecuador, Mexico and Bolivia. These movements attain an important influence at a national and international level that transcends sectorial claims, reaching the point of questioning both neoliberal economic policy and the political legitimacy of the governments that promote them as well as the constitutive form of the nation-state in Latin America. In this regard, for example, in the Ecuadorian case, the indigenous movement has striven for recognition for a political project which, reflected in the demand for a pluri-national state, seeks to guarantee self-government for the diverse indigenous nations. Under an even more radical claim of autonomy, the experience of the Zapatist movement demanded constitutional recognition for the rights of the indigenous peoples, which, partially crystallized in the so-called San Andrés Agreements (1995), would inspire the "caravan for dignity" that traveled through much of Mexico in the first months of 2001 to demand that they be complied with. To this brief listing one should add the

activity of the indigenous movements of the Bolivian Altiplano (and also, although to a lesser degree, on the Peruvian side) and of the so-called "coca-growing movements" of Aymara peasants in the Chapare and the Yunga region in Bolivia and southern Peru, against the policy of eradication of coca crops demanded by the United States government. The prolonged activity of the Mapuche peoples of southern Chile (particularly embodied in the so-called Arauco-Malleco Coordination) against the appropriation of their lands and the over-exploitation of natural resources, as well as in Colombia's Cauca Valley, are other outstanding examples of this type of struggle that seems to be carried out in the entire Latin American region. One may also point to the momentum acquired as of 2002 by the opposition of the original peoples of Central America against the Puebla Panama Plan, aimed at accelerating the penetration of transnational capital and investment in that region.

The appearance and consolidation of these indigenous movements on the political and social stage of the region is also accompanied by the emergence of numerous peasant movements that reach a significant presence at both national and regional levels. Standing out in this sense is the experience of the Brazilian Movement of the Landless Rural Workers (MST). The sustained takeovers of land and of public buildings to demand a progressive and comprehensive land reform, its actions against the spread of the model of genetically modified farming, and the development of the so-called "settlements", have turned the MST into one of the social movements with the greatest political significance in the region. Its experience exemplifies a process of increasing mobilization and organization of the rural sectors at a regional level, embodied in the dissemination of landless movements in other Latin American countries (for example in Bolivia and Paraguay) and in the intensification of the peasant struggles in Mexico, Paraguay and Central America, and in their ability to likewise convoke the small-scale producers hit hard by the policies of liberalization of the agricultural sector carried forward under the promotion of free trade agreements. In the same direction, one may point to the growth of the protests and of the convergence processes experienced in the countryside against the economic and social consequences caused in those sectors by the fall in the international prices of numerous farm products, draconian credit policies and the tariff barriers against that type of products erected in the industrialized countries.

At the same time, in the urban arena, the structural effects of unemployment generated by neoliberal policies have –especially in countries of the Southern Cone– entailed the appearance and consolidation of movements of jobless workers. Argentina appears in this sense as the most emblematic case of this phenomenon, in which these movements, which receive the name of *piqueteros*[3], occupy a central position –particularly as of 1999– on the stage of antineoliberal protest and in the acceleration of the political and social crisis that led to the resignation of president Fernando De la Rúa in December 2001.

Meanwhile, Latin American cities have been subjected to deep processes of spatial and social reconfiguration through the impact of liberal policies. The processes of "municipal decentralization" instrumented under the aegis of the fiscal adjustments (with the aim of "alleviating" the responsibility of the central governments to transfer resources to local administrations) have had enormous consequences on the daily life of the inhabitants of the cities. The processes of fragmentation and dualization of the urban space, abandonment of public spaces, deterioration in services and spread of violence have been only some of the most visible consequences of this profound social and spatial transformation that took place in the cities of the region. Recent urban conflicts seem to prove this multiplicity of troubles emanating from the social polarization promoted by neoliberalism. The struggles for access to housing (roofless movements), for the improvement of public services and against the rise in the rates of these, for the defense of public schooling, and against decentralization policies, also witness, in many cases, the confluence of diverse social sectors. The scourges caused by natural catastrophes (earthquakes, cyclones, floods) worsened by the increasing ecological impact of current capitalist development, as well as the abandonment of rural populations in the face of the need for governmental assistance and investment, explain the numerous mobilizations in demand of assistance by local and national governments.

The importance attained by these movements with a territorial basis that we have briefly summarized is far, however, from entailing the disappearance of the conflict involving urban wage-earning workers. Not only because in many of these movements one can make out the presence of workers in the diffuse and heterogeneous forms that this category assumes under a neoliberalism that leads to processes of "reidentification in terms not linked to the relation between capital and labor, but in other, very different ones, among which the criteria of 'poverty' and 'ethnicity', of occupations and of 'informal' activities and of primary communities are, probably, the most frequent" (Quijano, 2004). The verification that emerges from the monitoring of social conflicts in Latin America carried out by OSAL is that the world of labor, particularly in the urban space, far from being a secondary matter in the practice of defending claims, occupies an outstanding spot in the map of social protest, representing over a third of the conflicts surveyed over the course of the period extending from May 2000 to December 2003. Nevertheless, this quantitative weight in the register of protests contrasts with the difficulties which these (and the union organizations that promote them) face in transcending their sectorial nature and reaching a national dimension, and point to a redefinition in favor of a significant stellar role for civil servants, who account for around three quarters of the total of such protests[4].

These struggles by government-employed wage earners are undertaken in the face of the insistent reform and privatization efforts encouraged by neoliberal policies, in particular as a result of the launching of fiscal adjustment packets demanded and negotiated by governments with the international organizations. Of particular significance in this sector are the dynamics of teachers and professors whose claims refer fundamentally to wage increases, the payment of wages in arrears, increases in the education budget, and the rejection of education reform proposals (particularly the flexibilization of working conditions). In some countries, the actions that ensue from the opposition to the privatization of public education allow a convergence with student sectors (in the university arena) as well as with other sectors (pupils' parents, for example) which, backing the teachers' demands and participating in the defense of public education, seem to point to the appearance of the "education community" form in the development of these conflicts (*OSAL*, 2003).

Attention may also be drawn to the intense practice in defense of their claims by administrative employees who mobilize against dismissals, for wage increases or wages in arrears, and against the reform of the state. Within the government sector, one may also underline the conflicts in many countries involving health workers, over wage claims, in favor of increases in the budget allocated to public hospitals and to the sanitary system in general, and for the improvement of working conditions. It is interesting to stress that the form of protest in this sector recurrently adopts the modality of extended stoppages –including strikes for an indeterminate period– and are articulated both under the form of national and regional strikes called by labor federations (these are recurrently recorded in almost all countries) and with street mobilization processes. In the same sense, one may also stress the conflicts against the privatization of government-owned enterprises.

But if the "first generation" privatization wave undertaken at the beginning of the 1990s by some governments in the region was characterized by social resistance fundamentally led by unions and by the workers of the sectors affected, the struggles against the "second generation" privatizations in some cases appear as a moment of social aggregation of protest which becomes manifest through the emergence of spaces of political and social convergence of a wide-ranging character. In the first of these cases, where these protests remained restricted to the workers and were unable to constitute wider social fronts that would transcend particular demands, they were, in general, defeated. The conflict being circumscribed to the employees at the enterprises in question, after the privatization a large part of them were laid off and went on to swell the ranks of the unemployed. The new cycle of social protest that we are analyzing, on the contrary, seems to exhibit a change in relation to this question. Some recent examples, such as the protests promoted by the Civic Front of Arequipa in southern Peru against the sale of the government-run power utilities (2002), and by the Democratic Congress of the People in Paraguay for the repeal of the law that allowed the privatization of state-owned companies

(2002), serve to illustrate the broad convergence against the privatizations of social sectors (peasant federations, unions, students, NGOs and political parties) whose struggles are provisionally successful and force the governments to backtrack on their privatizing intentions[5]. This type of protests often takes on a markedly radical form (urban uprisings, lengthy highway blockades, takeover and occupation of company facilities) which appears to accompany a confrontational trend in its activities that characterizes the current cycle of protests that the region is undergoing. At the same time, the denunciation of corruption and the demand for greater democratic participation and transparency in local political life have prompted city dwellers to express their dissatisfaction, also promoting sectorial convergence processes under the form of popular uprising (*puebladas*) or of community mobilizations.

If in previous decades youthful participation and mobilization in Latin America was to a great extent channeled through the strong presence of the university student movement, youth protests now seem to adopt new forms and channels of expression. The decrease in the levels of school attendance resulting from the combined effects of the process of privatization of education and of the concentration of income and rise in poverty may perhaps explain, among other causes, the loss of relative weight of students' movements. Although students still constitute a dynamic sector in the context of social conflictivity, even being involved in multisectorial protests that go beyond educational demands, the expression of youthful discontent is also channeled through an active participation in the movements of the jobless, of young *favela* dwellers in Brazil, in alternative currents and collective cultural phenomena of diverse types, in human rights movements, in indigenous and peasant protests and union-related groupings of young, impoverished workers. Younger generations have had an active and outstanding participation in the mass protests of a political nature that led to the resignation of presidents or that radically put into question the implementation of adjustment policies and privatizations, thus nuancing the stereotyped views of reality that speak of a marked youthful disenchantment with political participation in a wide sense. In the same context, it is necessary to underline the major importance and role filled by women in the social movements referred to. Feminine figures also stand out in the constitution of these territorial movements (Zibechi, 2003), being reflected both in the notable role displayed by *piqueteras*, Zapatist and indigenous women, and in the revitalization and reformulation of the feminist currents of previous decades, which crystallized, among other experiences, in the so-called "world march of women" and in the reference to the "feminization of poverty" (Matte and Guay, 2001).

Lastly, in the current setting of Latin American social protest, particular significance is exhibited by the processes of regional and international convergence that have acquired a strong momentum in recent years and that, by virtue of their scope and geographical insertion and the number of movements and social groupings they are capable of attracting, constitute an unprecedented experience in this continent. In the past, the experiences of international coordination of social movements found their most conspicuous expressions in the areas of labor organizations or of university student sectors. These convergences centered fundamentally on the defense of sectorial or professional interests, a fact that entailed great difficulties in transcending the arena of their specific demands. The impact and consequences of the "neoliberal globalization", and consequently the irruption into national political settings of processes of continental scope (among others, for example, the so-called free trade agreements), in many cases linked to the penetration of transnational –particularly US– capital, have led to the appearance and reaffirmation of hemispheric coordination experiences with the confluence of labor, women's and students' movements, NGOs, political parties, and antimilitarist and environmental groupings in which a decisive role falls to peasant organizations (particularly through the Latin American Coordination of Peasant Organizations, CLOC, and its international articulation, Vía Campesina [Peasant Path]). The Continental Campaign against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), promoted by the Continental Social Alliance and other networks and groupings (as well as the constitution of the Social Movements International Network), constitutes perhaps the most outstanding example, to which the innumerable amount of regional and continental gatherings (which also include movements from North America)

against the Puebla Panama Plan and regional militarization and foreign interventions (particularly in reference to the so-called Colombia Plan and Andean Initiative) is added. In this process, the constitution of the World Social Forum (WSF, 2001-2004) appears as the most prominent experience of these convergences, not only at an international but also at a continental and regional level.

## The new configuration of popular movements

Within this overview, which we have briefly summarized in relation to the features exhibited by social conflictivity in Latin America in recent years, some of the particular aspects that distinguish the actions and constitution of contemporary social and popular movements in our region already stand out. The analysis of these experiences and, particularly, the understanding and conceptualization of the novel aspects posed by those movements in the historical course of collective action and social contestation, constitute one of the centers of attention of the shaping and revitalization of current Latin American social thinking. The renewed generation of studies and publications about these subjects has also entailed the constitution of a new field of *problématiques* as well as an enrichment of the theoretical and methodological frameworks related to the study of social movements. One of the manifestations of these processes and of the debates posed is, for example, the position recently taken up within critical thinking by the discussion on the conceptualization of power and the role pertaining to the nation-state in reference to the views of social emancipation promoted by those movements[6]. It is not however our intention to present the *problématiques* orienting the debates and the reflections of social scientists –and of the movements themselves[7]. We are interested in underlining and going deeper into some of the features that distinguish the configuration of social movements at this time.

In relation to this, and with regard to the "repertories of protest", it is important to point out a trend toward a greater radicalness in the forms of struggle, which is manifested in the duration of protests (actions over prolonged or indeterminate periods); in the generalization of confrontational forms of struggle to the detriment of demonstrational measures; in the regional spread of certain modalities such as the blockading of roads (characteristic, for example, of the protests of both the movements of jobless workers in Argentina and of the indigenous and coca-growing movements in the Andean Area) and the takeover of land (promoted by the peasant movements) or of public or private buildings. At the same time, the recurrence of lengthy marches and demonstrations that traverse regional and national spaces over the course of days and weeks seems to want to counteract the dynamics of territorial segmentation promoted by neoliberalism. Likewise, the *puebladas* and urban uprisings appear to be strategies aimed at the collective re-appropriation of the community space and at the recovery of a social visibility denied by the mechanisms of power (Seoane and Taddei, 2003).

In relation to the social actors that seem to take part in this new cycle of protests analyzed, we may stress two features that we have already singled out previously. The first is the displacement of the wage earners' conflict to the public sector, to the detriment of the impact and importance of those promoted by workers in the private sector. This fact, in turn, implies a particular configuration that runs through the actions of labor organizations, while the dynamics of the posing of demands by the public sector calls on the participation and convergence of other social sectors in the defense of access to, and the quality of, education and health as human rights. In this sense, it is important to underline that in many cases the struggles against these policies of dismantlement and privatization, and the boosting of the convergence processes –which adopt the forms of coordinating units and civic fronts– don't necessarily rest on wage-earning labor dynamics. The role played by other organizations (peasant and indigenous movements, the unemployed, students, urban movements, among others) in the shaping of these "expanded social coalitions" is of major importance. The second characteristic refers to the consolidation of movements of rural origin –indigenous and peasants–, which reach national and regional significance and influence. These develop a notable capacity of interpellation and articulation with urban social sectors, in many cases successfully being able

to link the dynamics of the struggle against neoliberalism (agrarian policy, privatizations, fiscal adjustment) to a wider questioning of the bases of legitimacy of the political systems in the region.

These two brief pointers –as well as the description of the setting of social conflictivity presented earlier– therefore allow us to go deeper into the characterization of the particular configuration that appears to distinguish the experimentation of contemporary social movements in the region. Without seeking to exhaust this issue, it is necessary, in our understanding, to emphasize three elements that under different forms and with diverse intensities seem to run through the constitutive practice of the majority of the most significant Latin American social movements.

In the first place, a dynamics of territorial appropriation that characterizes the collective practice of what we have earlier referred to as rural and urban territorial movements. Presented as "the strategic response of the poor to the crisis of the old territoriality of the factory and the farm... [and to] the de-territorialization of production... [promoted by] neoliberal reforms" (Zibechi, 2003), as well as to the process of privatization of the public sphere and of politics (Boron, 2003a), this trend to re-appropriation by the community of the living space in which those movements are located remits to the expansion of the experiences of productive self-management (Sousa Santos, 2002b), the collective solution of social needs (for example in the field of education and of health), and autonomous forms of handling of public affairs. This diversified continuum encompasses the cooperative settlements of the Brazilian MST, the indigenous communities in Ecuador and Bolivia, the autonomous Zapatist town governments in Mexico, the productive undertakings of the various jobless movements and movement of recovered factories both in Argentina, as well as the *puebladas* and urban uprisings that implied the emergence of practices of management of the public space (such is the case for example of the "Water War" in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and of the experience of the popular assemblies that emerged in the main urban centers of Argentina after December 2001). In this sense, this rising "territorialization" of social movements is the result both of the extension of "forms of reciprocity, that is to say, of the exchange of labor force and of products without passing through the market, albeit with an inevitable, but ambiguous and tangential, relationship with it... [as well as of] new forms of political authority, of a communal character, that operate with and without the state" (Quijano, 2004). In permanent tension with the market and the state, extended in time or unstable and temporary, settling around practices of "production and reproduction of life" (Zibechi, 2003) or simply operating in the terrain of the management of public and political affairs, this dynamics of collective re-appropriation of the social territory appears to guide the experience not only of the indigenous and peasant movements, but also in the urban space (Seoane, 2003a). In this sense, we might state that "antineoliberal politics would appear to head towards an action of [...] reproduction and production of society beyond the expanded and dislocated production of transnational capital" (Tapia, 2000).

In consonance with this experience, the practice and discursiveness of the majority of the social movements described appears imbued with the revaluing of democratic mechanisms of participation and decision which, inspired in references to direct or semi-direct democracy, orient both their organizational models and their programmatics and demands *vis-à-vis* the state. In this regard, on one hand, the promotion of more horizontal and open forms of participation is seen as reinsurance in the face of the danger of "disconnection" between the different organizational levels and of bureaucratization and manipulation. On the other hand, the confrontation with the neoliberal hegemony in the terrain of public policies has been translated into a growing questioning of the political system, of the model of representative democracy, and of the form that the constitution of the nation-state adopted in Latin America, promoting a diversity of demands that ranges from those for consultations and referendums to claims for autonomy and self-government, boosted particularly by the indigenous movements. The experiences of social self-organization linked to assembly-like forms of organization were a feature of the emergence of many of these movements (for example of the organizations of jobless workers and of the popular assemblies in Argentina or the urban uprisings of the "Water

War" and the "Gas War" in Bolivia). Additionally, the traditional experiences of community management that characterized indigenous communities, reformulated under the impact of neoliberal policies, have served to pose a critical and alternative view of delegational and representative forms. In this terrain, the Zapatist experimentation crystallized in the watchword of "commanding while obeying" (Ceceña, 2001) is perhaps the clearest and most suggestive example, although not the only one. At the same time, the utilization and presence in the programmatics of many of these movements of instruments of semi-direct democracy can be verified, for example, in the demand for the gas referendum and the summoning to a Constitutional Assembly in the events of October in Bolivia (2003), in the referendums against the privatizations in Uruguay, or in the demand for binding plebiscites on the FTAA promoted by the social coalitions constituted in opposition to that trade agreement at a continental level. In the same direction, be it under the form of the demand for a plurinational state in the case of the Ecuadorian indigenous movements, or of the demand and construction of self-government in the autonomous Zapatist town governments, the claim of autonomy for indigenous peoples encompasses, in its projection on society, the broaching of a radical democratization of the forms of the nation-state, particularly in the "coloniality of power" that characterized its constitution (Lander, 2000). Lastly, access to local governments by representatives of those movements (especially in the experience of the Ecuadorian hills and in the Cauca valley in Colombia) has entailed the launching of mechanisms of popular participation and control in their handling (Larrea, 2004). In the diversity of the experiences described above, one many thus point to the emergence of a democratizing trend that traverses the collective practice of these social movements both in their spaces of autonomy and in the terrain of the state (Seoane, 2004; Bartra, 2003a), and expresses the extent to which "participatory democracy has taken on a new dynamics enacted by subordinate social communities and groups struggling against social exclusion and the trivialization of citizenship" (Sousa Santos, 2002a).

Lastly, it may be pointed out that, as from the protests against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MIA, 1997/98), the "battle of Seattle" that impeded the so-called Millennium Round of the World Trade Organization (1999), the creation and deepening of the experience of the World Social Forum (WSF, 2001 through 2004) and the "global days of action" against the military intervention in Iraq (2003/2004), the backbone of a "new internationalism" has left a deep and singular imprint on the experimentation of social movements in the world arena. The eminently social character of the actors involved (albeit not unlinked, should it be necessary to make this clear, to ideological and political inscriptions), their heterogeneity and scope, the truly international extension of the convergences, the organizational forms and the characteristics taken on by these articulations point to the novelty of this internationalism (Seoane and Taddei, 2001). As we have already shown, the Latin American region has not remained outside this process. On the contrary: the holding in 1996 of the 1st Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism organized by Zapatism in the depths of the Chiapas forest –which may be considered one of the first international summons located at the origin of this process–, as well as the fact that the birth of the WSF took place in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, point to the profound imbrication between the growth of protest and social movements in Latin America, and the emergence of the global convergences against neoliberal globalization. In this region, over the course of recent years, these experiences have been particularly marked by the evolution of the so-called agreements on trade liberalization, and especially of the United States' initiative of subsuming the countries of the region within a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). These resistance processes, that implied both the constitution of spaces of coordination at a regional level (which group a wide array of movements, social organizations and NGOs) and the emergence of similar convergence experiences at a national level (for example, the national campaigns against the FTAA), turn out to be, within the continental framework and along with the experience of the Social Forums and of the mobilizations against the war, an expression and extension of the alterglobalist movement that emerged and was consolidated in the last decade. In relation to this process of convergences against "free trade", the regional experience hails back to the protests triggered by the negotiation and launching (1994) of NAFTA (North

American Free Trade Agreement), the creation of the Continental Social Alliance (1997), the organization of the 1st Summit of the Peoples of the Americas (1998) in opposition to the 2nd Summit of presidents of the 34 American countries that participate in the negotiation over the FTAA, and the organization of the Hemispheric Meetings of Struggle Against the FTAA (Havana, Cuba; 2002 to 2004). Nevertheless, particularly in relation to the dynamics and characteristics taken on by these negotiations as of 2003 –marked by the proximity of the date foreseen for their conclusion (2005), the difficulties and resistance it faces and the acceleration of the plurilateral Free Trade Agreements–, these convergence and protest processes are intensified at a regional level[8]. In Central America, the fruit of these experiences has been the creation and development of the Mesoamerican Forums and of the so-called Central American Popular Block. In the case of the countries forming part of MERCOSUR, the so-called "National Campaigns against the FTAA" have promoted diverse and massive popular consultations and have evolved toward the increasing questioning of "free trade" in the face of the different trade negotiations undertaken by governments. Lastly, in the Andean Area the articulation between the rejection of these treaties with massive protests in the national spaces (for example, the "Gas War" in Bolivia, 2003) and the emergence of regional coordination processes (for example, in April 2004, the first Andean Day of Mobilization Against the FTAA) point to the wealth of such processes. In this direction, the forthcoming holding of the 1st Americas Social Forum in Ecuador (July 2004) will constitute an arrival point of these experiences as well as an event that will prove the maturity, depth, features and challenges faced by internationalism in the Latin American and continental arena.

## "Neoliberalism of war" and social convergences

The process opened in Latin America in recent years –in the face of the exhaustion of the neoliberal model in the form in which the latter tragically crystallized in the 1990s in our region– is increasingly expressed in the intensification of the disputes regarding the direction to be adopted by a transition whose outcome remains uncertain. In this sense, the social and political realities of the various countries is seen to be marked, as we pointed out earlier, by renewed social protest –which at a regional level has grown in recent years– and by the activity of social and popular movements with features different from those that had occupied stage center in the immediate past. This process, in the framework of the economic crisis undergone by most of the region and in the face of the attempts to deepen neoliberal policies, has in some cases been translated into "popular uprisings" (that in most cases ended in the collapse of governments), in the constitution of "electoral majorities" critical of neoliberalism, and even in the reappearance of a political discursiveness that differentiates itself from the latter. In their diversity, these processes point to the growing crisis of legitimacy that puts into question the cultural, economic and political forms that underpinned the application of neoliberalism in the past.

Nevertheless, in the face of this process, the attempts to deepen neoliberal policies have tended to a rising militarization of social relations in a process that has been given the name of "neoliberalism of war" (González Casanova, 2002; Taddei, 2002). This refers not only to the policy of war and of military intervention wielded as an international prerogative by president Bush –particularly a posteriori of the attacks of September 11, 2001– but also to the deepening of a repressive social diagram that encompasses legal reforms that slash democratic rights and freedoms and award greater power and immunity to the actions of police forces, and the criminalization of poverty and social movements, the so-called "judicialization" of protest, the increase in state and para-state repression, and the rising intervention of the armed forces in domestic social conflict. Justified by the alleged fight against the drug traffic, terrorism or crime, the ideology of "security" thus seeks the reconstitution of the challenged "neoliberal governability". One of its most tragic expressions has been the increase of the United States military presence in the entire Latin American region (Quijano, 2004; Algranati, Seoane and Taddei, 2004). Additionally, in the terrain of domestic policies, the Colombian case emerges as one of the main laboratories for the implanting of these repressive diagrams, particularly under the administration of president Álvaro Uribe, who opened a process that seeks not only to

deepen the military confrontation with the guerrillas –after the peace agreements of the previous period were broken– but also the deployment of a policy of "social militarization" in the attempt to affirm an authoritarian legitimacy, particularly among middle-class urban sectors (Zuluaga Nieto, 2003). The face of the "neoliberalism of war" thus accompanies the promotion of a radical and even more regressive reconfiguration of the political, social and economic geography of the region as a result of the acceleration of the so-called "free trade agreements" that find their maximum expression in the FTAA.

We have attempted up to this point to give an account of the paths taken and features adopted by the process of social and political disputation opened by the crisis of the neoliberal model forged in the 1990s and of the characteristics that appear to distinguish the configuration of contemporary social movements. As we have pointed out, this process is not homogeneous, and is expressed in a differentiated manner in each of the regions into which the continent may be subdivided and even within these. In this regard, the evolution of the northern region (Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean) seems to evince a marked consolidation of trade liberalization processes, which constitute the cornerstone of Washington's strategic plans. At the same time, the convulsive political situation in a major part of the Andean region is a manifestation of the strong social tensions resulting from the attempts to deepen these "news" neoliberal recipe books, which are translated into the difficulty in the stabilization of the new political regimes that promote these policies. Expressions of this are the increasing popular discredit of the governments of Peru and of Ecuador; the setting opened with the "Bolivian October" that projects new confrontations and possible changes on the horizon, and the Venezuelan case, where the battle around the presidential recall referendum this coming August will undoubtedly acquire a regional dimension. The outcome of this process will be fundamental in Latin America with regard to the hegemonic aspirations of the White House to hinder the consolidation of democratic-popular political processes that challenge the neoliberal model. In the southern region, social movements face the great challenge of taking advantage of the chinks opened by the loss of legitimacy of neoliberalism to fight for the direction of the processes underway, maintaining and strengthening their autonomy in relation to governments.

Beyond the particular aspects exhibited by the processes at a subregional level, the generalization of free trade appears in all countries (with the exception of the Venezuelan case) as an axis emphasized by the political and economic elites to refound the neoliberal order and its legitimacy. In the face of this, the processes of regional convergence that on a national scale challenge the hegemonic economic model, and the emancipatory horizons that ensue from the practices and discourses that characterize social movements at the beginning of the twenty-first century, cast light on the outlines of those "other possible Americas" that our peoples so strongly call for.

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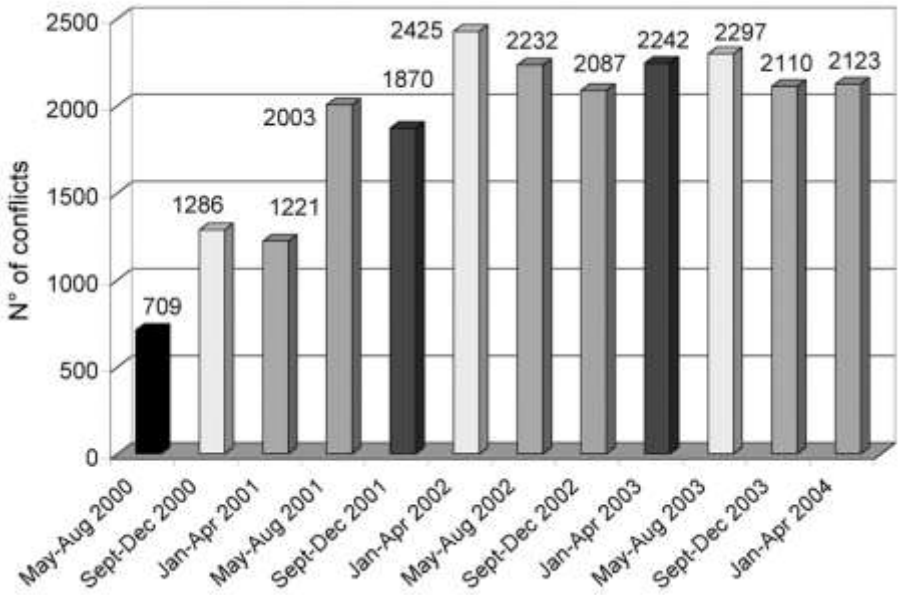
## Chart 1
## Evolution of social conflictivity in Latin America*
## May 2000/April 2004




* Survey carried out on the basis of a perusal of national newspapers of 18 Latin American countries, namely: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Drawn up by the Latin American Social Observatory (OSAL), Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO).

## Notes

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1 We are particularly grateful for the comments of Ivana Brighenti and Miguel Ángel Djanikian in the revision of the text.

2 We find it impossible to develop this issue here. Regarding the evolution of poverty and unemployment in Latin America, reference may be made to the reports on Human Development of the UNDP (2002) and of ECLAC (2002). With regard to the consequences in relation to democracy see Boron (2003a). Regarding the structural transformations of Latin American capitalism, see among others Quijano (2004) and Fiori (2001).

3 Road or highway blockade, generally for an extended period.

4 For example, for the year 2003, the conflicts involving workers of the public sector represent, according to the records supplied by OSAL (Latin American Social Observatory, CLACSO), 76% of the total number of protests by employed workers.

5 The most important among this type of protests undoubtedly turns out to be the so-called "Water War" in Cochabamba, Bolivia (2000), which frustrated the attempt to award a concession for, and privatize, the drinking water service in that city to an international consortium headed by the Bechtel company.

6 Regarding this debate one may consult, among other texts, the diverse dossiers published in numbers 12 and 13 of Chiapas magazine, as well as those included in numbers 4 and 7 of CLACSO's OSAL magazine.

7 We have broached that question in the course "Neoliberalism and Social Movements in Latin America: the Configuration of Social Protest", taught in the framework of the distance education courses under the platform of CLACSO's Virtual Campus, 2003.

8 An evaluation of this process may be consulted in OSAL (2004).